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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted during the 1964-65 school year to determine the kinds of social adaptation made by inner-city black children who were bused to two middle-class, predominantly white elementary schools and by white students new to the same schools. Two-way social adjustment ratings (from students and teachers) were obtained on about half of the black students and about 3/4 of the white students. Results showed that a majority of the children, black and white, adjusted well to their new school. A discrepancy existed between the opinions of teachers and students about their adjustment; teachers tended to rate white students as well adjusted more frequently than they themselves did and black students as poorly adjusted more frequently than they themselves did. It is considered that this tendency on the part of the white teachers may result from a persistence of racial myths and social Darwinism. It is also suggested that, considering the weight a teacher's opinion carries, the maladaptations which are said to exist among some low-income minority group students may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document] (KM)

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THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUSED CHILDREN

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Recently a considerable amount of attention has been given to studying the intellectual capacity and academic achievement of the children of racial minorities and members of lower socio-economic status families. (Jensen, 1969:) (Jenks, 1972) These studies have been particularly concerned with determining the effect, if any, of special compensatory educational programs and various school and other environments up on the academic performance of young people.

At the 1972 Invitational Conference on Testing Problems sponsored by the Educational Testing Service, I was a discussant for three papers dealing with the issue of racial and cultural differences. In that presentation, I pointed out that minority persons have some ideas of their own on what they would like to get out of formal education. Blacks, particularly, are probably as interested in learning how to endure, develop positive concepts of themselves, and gain a measure of control over their environments as they are in gaining increases in their IQ. I pointed out that these other concerns have had survival value for members of racially oppressed populations. Because of this, members of such groups may be expected to ignore any educational program or practice which focuses largely on increasing intellectual performance at the expense of other important learnings. (Willie, 1972)

Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in public school education, many systems throughout the United States have been experimenting with alternative ways of achieving racial balance. Usually school integration programs have been pronounced successful, especially if they result in gains in academic performance for minority students. As important as this may be, public schools must consider the impact of formal education upon the whole child. For this reason, it is important to study the effect, if any, of formal education upon the social adaptations of students as well as its relationships to their academic performance.

This study is designed to achieve the goal of determining the kinds of

social adaptation made by inner-city black children who were transferred for the purpose of achieving a better racial balance to middle-class predominantly white elementary schools in a middle-sized urban community. The black children transferred were, of course, in a new situation. Most of them came from families with modest economic resources. Immediately the question comes to mind as to whether the social adaptation of these children was a function of their new situation or their socio-economic and racial backgrounds. To deal with this question information was obtained on a control group which consisted of white children new to the same schools because their families had moved recently into the neighborhoods surrounding these schools. Most of the new white children came from middle-class or affluent families.

Data and Method

The study was conducted during the 1964-65 school year in a north-eastern city in the United States which had a population of approximately one-quarter of a million people. Centerline is the fictitious name for this city. Its elementary and high schools enrolled 45,000 children, 30,000 of whom attended the public schools. At the time of this study, nearly seven percent of the city-wide population was black. This was the largest racial minority group in the local area.

The city is an industrial area with several large manufacturing plants which employ many workers with technical skills. Also there are state-operated and private institutions of higher education in the community. A majority of the labor force is white collar. However, this is not the case for the members of the racial minority groups. A majority of their members are blue collar workers with family incomes much below those of whites.

Prior to this study, the State Department of Education directed all school districts to examine their racial balances within individual schools and to plan immediate steps to change any racial imbalances; furthermore, school districts were directed to report plans for dealing with such problems to the

state agency.

In 1962, three schools in the Centerline School District had student bodies which were more than 50 percent black. Plans were developed to integrate elementary and junior high schools. Reported on in this study is the social adjustment of black and white students in the first deliberate effort on the part of a city school district to modify the racial balance of its elementary schools.

Two elementary schools in predominantly white middle-class neighborhoods were the first to receive approximately 155 black children. Their combined students numbered about 1,470. The black children who were bused in from the inner-city ghetto raised the proportion of minority group children to about 10 or 11 percent of all students. Previously, black children had been only one or two percent of the students in these schools. They were members of the few black families who lived outside the inner-city ghetto. All of the 57 full time teachers in the two elementary schools were white.

Realizing that adjustment to the new school setting might be interpreted differently depending on ones perspective, we asked the teachers and the students in each school to make individual assessments. This analysis includes only those students about whom there were two assessments. Unfortunately, we were able to get two-way evaluations on only about one-third of the black students who were new to these two schools. Thus the study population for black students is 86 -- slightly more than half of all new black students.

Of the approximately 75 whites new to these two elementary schools because their parents recently moved into the school's neighborhood area, two-way ratings on social adjustment were obtained on 57. This study population is about three-fourths of all new white students. It constitutes the control group which should enable the investigation to determine the relative importance of race, social class, area of residence, and newness of the situation for variations in social adaptation.

We consider a child to be adjusted if he or she accepted and was accepted by the teachers and pupils of the school. This is more or less an operational definition which requires reciprocal actions: acceptance of others by the student and acceptance of the student by others.

Two different techniques were used to obtain social adjustment ratings. Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire for each student toward the end of the 1964-65 school year. They were given a list of all of their pupils. At the top of the list this question was written: "In your opinion, has each child been assimilated into the school (that is, has each pupil accepted and been accepted by the staff and pupils of this school) so that he acts as a part of it?" Teachers were requested to check one of four ratings: A = Well Assimilated, B = Fairly Well Assimilated, C = Moderately Assimilated, and D = Poorly Assimilated. Items A and B were consolidated into a single category of Well Assimilated for the analysis.

Children were asked to estimate the extent of their adaptation to the school with the assistance of the Colvin Picture Test. For Row C of this test, children were asked to make believe that the pictures ranked from 1 to 10 were pictures of some of the children in their class. They were told that picture 10 was that of the least liked boy or girl, and picture 1, that of the most liked person. Then the children were instructed to determine where they belonged on the continuum. They were asked to encircle the first picture if they believed that they were most liked and number 10 if they were least liked and some other intermediate number if they were neither the least nor the most liked. Responses to the 10-interval scale were grouped into three composite categories for analytical purposes and designated as Well, Moderate and Poor. The Colvin Picture Test was administered to all new students in the two elementary schools, except first grade students who were too young to respond appropriately.

Findings

A general finding of this study is that elementary school children have the capacity to handle new educational situations. A majority of the children, black and white, adjusted well to their new school. This was the considered judgment of the students as well as their teachers. It should be noted that the capacity to adjust well to a new school situation was exhibited by black children from lower socio-economic areas of the city who were bused to predominantly white middle-class schools and by white children who were residents of the middle-class neighborhoods surrounding their school. From the point of view of the teacher or the student, less than one out of every five of the students made a poor adjustment to their new school. All believed that 80 percent or more of the new students, including those of different races, socio-economic status, and residential areas, made well to moderately well adjustments in school, as seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 and Table 2 (about here)

While students and teachers are in agreement about the adjustment capacities of new students in general, they tend to disagree with reference to particular students. Indeed, there is a high probability of disagreement between a particular student and a particular teacher in evaluating the kind of adaptation that student has made to a new school setting. The figures found along a line drawn diagonally from the upper left hand corner of Table 1, from the row-column Well Adjusted, through the row-column Moderate Adjustment, to the row-column Poor Adjustment in the lower right hand corner indicate a 51 percent level of agreement between black students and their white teachers about the kinds of adjustments made by particular black students. A similar analysis for white students with data presented in Table 2 reveals a similar finding — only 49 percent agreement between white students and their white teachers with reference

PS 006392

Table 1

The Adjustment of New Black Bused Children to Two Middle-Class Elementary Schools, Centerline, 1964-65

Student Ratings	Teacher Ratings			Total	
	Well	Moderate	Poor	No.	%.
Well	34	10	10	54	.63
Moderate	14	8	3	25	.29
Poor	4	1	2	7	.08
Total No.	52	19	15	86	
Total %	.66	.22	.17		1.00

Table 2

The Adjustment of New White Neighborhood Children to Two Middle-Class Elementary Schools, Centerline, 1964-65

Student Ratings	Teacher Ratings			Total	
	Well	Moderate	Poor	No.	%
Well	24	8	1	33	.58
Moderate	14	3	1	18	.32
Poor	4	1	1	6	.10
Total No.	42	12	3	57	
Total %	.74	.21	.05		1.00

to the kinds of adjustments made by specific students. Thus, the teacher's opinion about the kind of adaptation made to a new school by a white or a black student is likely to differ from the student's self-evaluation one out of every two times. This finding indicates that students and teachers tend to view and evaluate new situations differently and that these differences exists for teachers in relationship to all of their students, including those who are black and those who are white.

A racial and/or socio-economic and/or residential area factor is involved in the kind of discrepancy which exists between teacher-student evaluations for black students and teacher-student evaluations for white students. The numbers are small and conclusions, therefore, cannot be stated with certainty. Nevertheless, the patterns is clear with the largest proportionate difference in teacher evaluations of students versus student self-evaluations occurring in the category of Poor Adjustment. The number of white teachers (15) who believed that black students were adjusting poorly to their new school was twice as great as the number of black students (7) who held a similar opinion about themselves. With references to white students the findings were the reverse. The number of white students (6) who believed that they were adjusting poorly to their new school was twice as great as the number of white teachers (3) who held a similar opinion about these students.

The discrepancy, proportionately, between the opinions of teachers and the opinions of students about their adjustment in the new school setting was not as great for well adjusted students as it was for poorly adjusted students. Nevertheless, the direction of the discrepancy again is worthy of note for the different racial populations. The number of white students (42) whom white teachers believed were well adjusted in their new school was one-fifth larger than the number of white students (33) who believed themselves to be well adjusted. With reference to black students, the number which white teachers believed to be well adjusted (52) was almost the same as the number of black students (54) who believed themselves to be well adjusted. Teacher opinion and

student opinion have come together for the first time on this latter item.

It is interesting to note that the self-reported patterns of adjustment to the new school setting by white neighborhood children and black bused children are quite similar, almost identical. As seen in Tables 1 and 2, 63 percent of the black students compared to 58 percent of the white students believed themselves to be well adjusted in their new school; 29 percent of the black students compared to 32 percent of the white students described their adjustment as moderate, and 8 percent of the black students compared to 10 percent of the white students felt that they were poorly adjusted. These data, of course, have the limitation of being self-reports. They are valid subjective statements, however. From the perspective of the student then, social adjustment in public school does not appear to be a function of race, socio-economic status or residential area.

From the perspective of the teacher, however, poor social adjustment, although limited in scope to less than one-fifth of any racial or socio-economic status population whose members are new to a school, is influenced significantly in a negative way by a black heritage, poor background, and inner-city residential area, and in a positive way by a white heritage, affluent background, and middle-class neighborhood. There is no reason to believe that the teacher assessment of student social adjustment is any more valid than the student's own subjective assessment. It is a different perspective that teachers provide, no more and no less. Considering the power position of the teacher in the public school system over against that of the student, however, the teacher's perspective is likely to carry more weight. Thus the maladaptations which are said to exist among some low-income minority group students who are bused into middle-class affluent communities of the majority group may be no more than the self-fulfilling prophecy of the teacher. (Merton, 1949:) The black and white students themselves see no differences in their patterns of adaptation to new school situations, notwithstanding their different racial, socio-economic and residential circumstances.

Also the tendency for the white teacher to believe that some black students adjusted more poorly to their new school setting than the blacks believed they had adjusted and that some white students had adjusted well to their new school setting better than the whites believed they had adjusted indicates possibly a persistence of social Darwinism in American thought. (Hofstadter, 1955:) Some members of the outgroup are still looked upon as subhuman in their capacity to adapt to a new situation while some members of the ingroup are exhalted as superhuman in their capacity to adapt. These racial myths may persist for some of the teachers but not for the students.

This study, therefore, makes not only a substantive contribution by indicating how adaptive are black and white children to new school situations. It also makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating once more how different perspectives on social events are related to the position one occupies in the social structure. Such a finding should caution all in the body-politic against the temptation to speak authoritively for others.

Several years ago in his excellent little book on Becoming, Gordon Allport cautioned us to "guard against the fallacy of projecting: of assuming that other people have states of mind, interests, and values precisely like our own." (Allport, 1955:23) The data of this study clearly indicate that adults in general, and teachers in particular, should be careful concerning the kinds of statements they make about the kinds of adaptations young people make to new and different social situations.

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